

Sen. Nelson pressures BP claims facility, gets resident paid

By Dusty Ricketts

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DESTIN — One resident who has struggled for months to be reimbursed for lost income from the BP oil spill finally received some relief Tuesday, thanks to Sen. Bill Nelson's office.

Teresa Abraham, who owns a small publishing company that prints tourist-related products, filed an emergency claim with the Gulf Coast Claims Facility in November for lost advertising revenue. The claims facility denied the claim in December, citing a lack of documentation despite Abraham submitting backup information.

"It was fantastic the way these guys (Nelson's staff) assisted me," Abraham said. "They have worked and worked harder than anything I have ever seen, sometimes checking up daily.

"There are some serious payments I need to make and this will help me begin to make them," she said.

Abraham said she received was half the amount she had requested. She asked that the amount of the payment not be published.

She said Nelson gave Ken Feinberg, the claims agency's administrator, a copy of her claim in early December and Feinberg said he would expedite it through the claims process. When nothing happened, Nelson took Abraham's claim to Feinberg a second time in Washington, D.C., during an ad hoc committee meeting and chided him for not handling the claims he tells people he will look investigate.

Nelson said he was very happy that Abraham finally received some payment, but added that many more people along the Emerald Coast need help and that the claims process is not working fast enough.

Nelson said Feinberg has not kept his promise that the claims process would be quick, open and independent of BP, and has asked the White House to investigate the Gulf Coast Claims Facility.

"We're going to absolutely insist that the claims facility be independent of BP," Nelson said. "The president stated it would be in his speech in Panama City, and a federal court judge has ruled that it is not independent. Of all the claims that are pending for long-term final payments, only one has been paid and that's a payment of \$10 million to, low and behold, a BP business partner. That doesn't sound very independent to me.

"The entire process has to be transparent, accountable and they have to have oversight on them," Nelson said. "It clearly is not transparent."